

ON THE NOW CANCELLED "WEEKEND" PROGRAM.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

Admiral Stansfield Turner: "Weekend -- Counter-Spy"

NBC Television: April 13, 1979

MAN: This is Friday, the 13th of April, 1979, NBC, Bill Brown, "Weekend" show, recording an interview with Admiral Turner, the DCI, in his office at headquarters. The next thing you'll hear is the beginning of that interview.

TECHNICIAN: We're set? Roll sound.

TECHNICIAN: Beginning camera roll one, take one.

Q: Admiral, explain to us in intelligence terms, what is covert action?

CIA DIRECTOR STANSFIELD TURNER: Covert action is the effort to influence events in a foreign country without being known who was doing the influencing. This is not an intelligence function. Intelligence is collecting information, evaluating it and giving it to the right people in our government. Covert action, however, has always been assigned to the Central Intelligence Agency by the Presidents of this country whenever they deemed it was an appropriate action for the country to take.

Q: And is covert action necessary for you to do your job?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think it is very important for our country to retain a covert action capability. The need for it goes in cycles, and right now I don't think there is a great need for it. But it would be very foolish for us not to have it available if that need arises again.

Q: Elaborate, though? Why is it important? Why do you need to retain that capability?

-2-

ADMIRAL TURNER: We try to influence events in foreign countries as part of our foreign policy by all kinds of means: show of military force, diplomacy, the United States Information Service and its broadcasts abroad. Sometimes it's desirable to try to exercise that influence without it being attributable to this country. There are some times when people would not react as well or as rapidly if they thought that we were propagandizing when, in fact, it's better just to do it on a quiet, unattributable basis.

Q: Can you give us, without naming names -- give us the kind of example of what you consider legitimate covert action by the CIA?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. Take the case of some of the things the country has done in its past. We have gone into a country where there has been a democratic election. And one side of the voting was being financed, controlled by communist money, communist influence. And in the past, our country has sometimes provided financial support to the free politicians to help them run in their elections on an equal footing. It's not desirable that that all be known and public, because it would add an unnecessary onus to the election process.

Q: And you don't regard that as undue interference in the internal affairs of another country?

ADMIRAL TURNER: We're not doing it to today because the attitudes of the country have changed on that. But this was done in the past, and it wasn't attempting to influence the election itself. It was attempting to give the people who were standing for democracy an equal opportunity with people who were financed from outside that country.

Q: You say it was done in the past. I take it you want to retain the ability to do it in the future.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

Q: Let's talk about this case in point of this magazine. How many CIA employees have been exposed by Covert Action magazine and its predecessors?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I don't have the number at my fingertips, but it's quite a few. It's a lot more than this country ought to afford. It's a terrible cost. It's a tremendous debilitation of our authorized capabilities when this kind of unnecessary, unauthorized exposure takes place.

Q: Well, let me pick you up on one thing first. You say it's quite a few. Are we talking about tens, dozens, hundreds? Can you give me a scale here?

-3-

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, it's far more than ten. But....

Q: In the hundreds?

ADMIRAL TURNER: But Agee's published lists, I think, of hundreds and hundreds of people. I really don't want to sort of give an estimate of how many of them are right and how many of them are wrong, because that would, again, help people zero in on it.

Q: You touched on it before, but how have these disclosures hurt the CIA? Have they prevented you from doing your job? Have they endangered your people?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Surely. We, of course, as you know, had one man assassinated after an exposure like this. We can't prove there was a causal relationship, but it's more, in my opinion, than coincidental that it happened in that way.

Chris, if you came to work here and spent ten or fifteen years of your life in necessary anonymity -- that's part of the business of being in intelligence for many of our people -- and just as you were really getting to the most fruitful part of your career you were exposed, you lost that anonymity, and therefore your value to us dropped markedly, you would certainly feel very put upon, and the country has lost a major investment; the individual has lost a lot of sacrifice that he's made for our country, and now he can't contribute when he's maybe right at his peak. It's a terrible thing for people to do.

Q: I want to get into some specifics, including the Welch case. But before we do, I'd like to get you to make a general statement of how serious a problem, how serious a threat "Covert Action" magazine is? Are we talking about something that's at the periphery, or do you feel it really strikes at the core of what you're doing? How seriously do you regard this threat?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The ability to maintain the anonymity of your intelligence people is just the heart of the intelligence business. So it's getting right at the heart.

My point is simply that these people publishing this magazine and other books that disclose the names of our people are not doing so in order to uncover malfeasance or abuses. They are avowedly doing this in order to destroy the intelligence collection capability of our country, which they do not believe in. But the Congress believes in it, the President believes in it, the country believes in it, and a lot of money and attention and effort is authorized to be put into intelligence, and here a handful of people are trying to thwart the

will of this country. And they should not be permitted to do that.

Q: Let's take kind of a case study. What happens to a CIA station chief who is exposed in this fashion? What happens to him professionally? What happens to his family personally?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Professionally, our ability to utilize him drops considerably, because wherever he goes from then on, other intelligence services of unfriendly countries instantly, of course, know who he is or can zero in on him. There are some places where we can tolerate that. Certainly there are others where we cannot.

So our ability to move him on the chessboard from "A" to "B" to "C" is limited now. We can only move him now from "A" to "C." And so his career opportunities are gone. And maybe he's a specialist in "B." Maybe he spent his life learning that language, and he's really capable at that, and now we can't utilize him that way.

And of course it's hard on their families, because, again, there are countries where you have to worry about the security of your family as well as yourself, and countries where there's an emotional reaction against either the United States or the CIA. So it's very hard on the wives and children in this kind of a circumstance.

Q: Your station chief in Athens, Richard Welch, was assassinated in 1975 after his cover was blown. Who do you blame?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I said before that I can't prove a direct causal relationship. But I certainly don't think the fact that his name was published by Philip Agee can be separated from that event. So I feel a degree of blame goes to those people who published his name. Of course, it was some terrorist organization in Athens that picked that up and decided to do it. Unfortunately, we've been giving all the assistance we can to the Greek government, and I know that they've been working as hard as they can. But we have not yet found the villains in this case.

Q: I just want to pursue that point for a little bit, because the people behind "Covert Action" magazine point out that -- or they say that the people who claimed responsibility for Welch's assassination said, in fact, they were going after his predecessor. Welch just happened to get in the way; he used the same house; and that, in fact, there was no tie-in between their disclosure several years before that Welch was working in Peru and the fact that he was finally killed in Athens.

-5-

You don't believe that? You think there is a tie-in?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I'm not accustomed to taking terrorists as my best sources of information and trusting them and feeling that they're very reliable. But as I said, I haven't absolute proof of this causal connection, but I'm certainly very suspicious.

Q: Admiral, why do you use covers, and specifically why do you use State Department covers for CIA people who work overseas?

ADMIRAL TURNER: We don't discuss what kind of covers we use. But collecting intelligence through the use of human beings, as opposed to technical systems, requires you not to have branded on your forehead "I am an intelligence officer." It's clearly a hazard if you do that. Human intelligence activities have taken place since biblical times, and human intelligence agents have not traditionally wanted to advertise that they were there to collect intelligence.

So if you are working for us, in many instances you have to have what we call cover. You have to have some other reason for being where you are being. And that's what this whole question is about in exposure that we're discussing.

Q: Do you want to change now or....?

TECHNICIAN: Yeah.

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TECHNICIAN: Beginning camera roll 2, take 2.

Q: Admiral, what do you know about the people who publish "Covert Action" magazine?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Not very much. It's published here in Washington, D. C., near DuPont Circle is my understanding. I don't really know who finances it. I wonder what kind of people are willing to put up money for this unpatriotic type of activity.

Q: Well, there're a couple of areas you bring up there. What do you think motivates the people who publish that?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think they're out to damage our country, because that's what they have avowedly said. They want to put us out of the clandestine intelligence business.

Q: Well, they say that it's not to damage the country,

but to help it. They call themselves patriots and say the CIA is doing the dirty business. What do you call them?

ADMIRAL TURNER: The CIA is under very tight controls established by the President, reinforced by the Congress. This country cannot live in the kind of world we live in today without collecting information.

Chris, do you remember 1972 and the great what steal that the Soviets pulled on us? I mean here's a case where a major country in the world won't even publish economic statistics, will then enter the world grain market in a dramatic way that affected you and me and our pocketbooks, because they were being so deceptive and taking advantage of us. And I think that's a small example compared with strategic missiles and weaponry and political moves around the world, but it's a very real example that gets right to each one of us as taxpayers. And we've got to be able to get good information about what closed societies around the world do.

Q: I'll repeat a question. They call themselves patriots. What do you call them?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Traitors.

Q: Traitors?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

Q: What should be done to them?

ADMIRAL TURNER: We should have laws that prohibit people from disclosing intelligence personalities.

Q: Traitors, though?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, they certainly aren't people working for the good of our country. You have people trying to undermine the values, the institutions of our country. I don't mind anyone standing up on a street corner, publishing something and saying "The CIA ought to be disestablished," and giving a good reason for it. And then we debate that in our open, democratic society, and the Congress decides. But all that debate has been taking place. There was a great deal of it in '75-'76. But the decisions have been made. The country has sustained the requirements for a good intelligence capability. The Congress finances us every year after thorough exploration of what we do and how we spend that money. And we should not let a handful of unpatriotic people undermine us.

Q: Is "Covert Action" -- is "Covert Action" magazine, under present laws, legal?

-7-

ADMIRAL TURNER: As far as I know, it is, yes.

Q: Why is that? I mean...

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, we do have freedom of speech in this country, and that's fine, and I'm all for that. But there are lots of laws that do limit what you can print. There isn't a law at this time that limits anyone from printing the name of our intelligence officers.

Q: So long as they're not in intelligence themselves and they're using non-classified information.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct.

Q: And I take it you'd like to see a change in that law.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I would like to see what we call some identities legislation, legislation that prevents the revelation of identities of intelligence personnel.

Q: Are you moving in this direction at all?

ADMIRAL TURNER: We are asking for support on that through the administration to the Congress.

Q: How accurate is this magazine in the people they name? Are they ever wrong?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Oh, yes. There're many, many errors. And that, too, is a grievous problem, because that means some person who does not work for us is then subject to the same kinds of dangers that people who do work for us are. And it's very unfair to those people.

Q: But if you're as disturbed about them as you seem to be, they must be pretty accurate?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, they have a reasonable batting average, but nowhere near 100%.

Q: They say that other countries' intelligence operations already know who the CIA operatives are, that they're just trying to expose the CIA to the average person. Do the spies in foreign countries know who each other are?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Does the average person on the street in this country want to know the identities of our intelligence people? I submit not. And therefore the purpose they have is not to inform the average person of this country, but to inform these intelligence operations of other countries, who do not

-3-

know our people all that way.

Q: When they say the average person, I think they mean the average person overseas; that if a person is in a student organization in Yugoslavia, that he knows that person who's working next to him is a CIA agent. That's the person I think they're talking about informing.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I don't think that that's their purpose at all. I think their purpose is to undermine us with these foreign intelligence agencies. And I don't think those agencies are all that familiar with our people.

Q: What do you think would happen to these people if they lived, say, in the Soviet Union and were exposing the operations of Soviet intelligence?

ADMIRAL TURNER: They wouldn't see the light of day. And they would be put in jail in nothing flat.

Q: Are the people who put out "Covert Action," to the best of your knowledge, under surveillance by any U. S. government agency?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, that's out of my field, because I'm not empowered, and should not be, to investigate the activities of Americans for legality. And we don't -- we don't look into the activities of people like those who publish "Covert Action."

Q: Well, the CIA might not do it. But to the best of your knowledge, is any U. S. government agency surveilling them?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'm not free to comment on that because that's some other department's activities. I'm not privy to that.

Q: I'm asking you again, though, to the best of your knowledge.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I just don't comment on that, because it can be interpreted incorrectly.

Q: But you're not going to deny it either.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'm not going to deny it; I'm not going to affirm, because if I deny it in this case, then you'll ask me it again in another case when I couldn't deny it, and we'd get into all kinds of problems.

[Off-mike conversation.]

-9-

MAN: Hold it a minute. Let's cut there. I'm sorry. I think what we're trying to get at is they've not broken any laws. They're immune, essentially. I think we have to get some sense of that. Unless there's legislation, they are immune from investigation....

ADMIRAL TURNER: All right, fine. Try it again.

Q: Okay, we'll get into that. I've got two more questions.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, no, try it.

Q: Do you want to change again, or have we got some time?

TECHNICIAN: Roll sound.

TECHNICIAN: Speed.

TECHNICIAN: Take 3.

Q: Why don't you state for us, Admiral, the immunity of these people, I mean the fact that -- what their status is under present law to do what they're doing.

ADMIRAL TURNER: To the best of my knowledge, Chris, at this point there is no law that can touch this kind of activity. And therefore, it's difficult for the law enforcement agencies of our country to do any checking or investigation of them, because, of course, they are properly protected by our laws, which mean you have to have some feeling or some evidence that they are breaking a law before you can investigate them.

Q: They're immune, free and clear, to keep doing what they're doing.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes. As far as I know, they're virtually immune at this point.

Q: And you don't like that.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I don't like that. I think it hurts our country when they are thwarting what the Congress and the President and the people have supported.

Q: Do you have any information about how "Covert Action" is financed, any evidence of influence or money from the Soviet Union or any other foreign government?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I don't, because, again, I can't investigate that kind of activity. It's my understanding they

make a charge for it. But I would gather from looking at the slickness, the quality of the paper, that it really doesn't pay for itself by its newsstand price. It must be subsidized by some outside source.

Q: Well, you say you have some questions about who would finance that kind of operation.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I certainly do.

Q: You've answered the question. Who would finance that kind of operation?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, certainly a foreign power with interests inimical to ours would be a good candidate. But on the other hand, people who are misguided and unpatriotic could do it. So it could be Americans or it could be foreigners.

Q: But you have no hard evidence either way.

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, I don't.

Q: The last area I want to get into with you really is sort of a philosophical area. In a democracy, where do you draw the line between people's right to oppose government and that government's right to gather intelligence?

ADMIRAL TURNER: You have to draw it very firmly on the law. And we are controlled by the laws, and we follow them carefully, and we have oversight committees of the Congress that check on this. Now where a law isn't detailed or precise enough, then you have to have regulations that are set by the President at his level, me at my level. But again, I would urge a recognition that since all the investigations of a few years ago, we've established oversight procedures to insure that those regulations are what the country wants. I report to two committees of the Congress on how these regulations are established and how we're fulfilling them. And that gives a really good check. In addition, the President has an independent oversight board. And they check on us and see if we're carrying out the law and the regulations.

So it isn't just my decisions how we carry out our responsibilities. I'm carefully checked on.

Q: But Admiral, under that same definition, by the law, these people are also legal in what they're doing. They're also allowed to expose your agents' names.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct. And we would like to see a law that would put that into proper perspective, so that there are limits as to what they can do here that hurts

-11-

our country. Today, for instance, if you work in the agriculture Department and you expose some information about future grain production, you can go to jail, because people could make money on such predictions. If you expose the names of our agents, we can't touch you.

Q: Would you like to see these people put out of business?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I certainly would. I certainly think that they're doing something that hurts you and me and the security of our country.

[Off-mike conversation.]

MAN: I think we're fine. One last thing, unless there's something we haven't covered that you'd like to.

[End of Side 1.]

Q: Is there anything else you want to talk about besides that, or is that it?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think that's it.

Q: I think we've pretty well covered that. In fact, very well covered it.

TECHNICIAN: Roll call. Speed.

TECHNICIAN: Beginning camera roll 3, take 4.

Q: Admiral, why don't we get you to finish this by explaining again what you think will be the impact if these people were operating in another country?

ADMIRAL TURNER: There are many countries in the world today that don't have freedom of speech, as do we. And people like this, if they were in the Soviet Union, say, would never see the light of day. They just don't permit dissent. We do; we want it. But it should be under some control, some degree of injury that can be done to our country. And here it has gone too far, because it doesn't serve an effective purpose for our country. And we believe there should be some kind of identities' legislation that prohibits the revelation of the identities of intelligence personnel.

Q: I just want to ask one other question. We must have done it before, but I think we got sort of side-tracked. Philosophically, where do you draw the line between people's

-12-

right to oppose things in a government they don't like and the government's right to do business?

ADMIRAL TURNER: It's a very difficult, delicate balance. It's a balance between how much we want privacy and propriety, on the one hand, and how much we want to have an effective intelligence service, on the other. That is up to the President, and it is up to the Congress. And right now, for instance, the Congress is debating the enactment of what we call charters for the intelligence community. It will set out, on the one hand, what we're allowed to do and why we're in business. It will set out, on the other hand, what are the limits of our authority.

Q: What you're saying is it isn't up to individual people with a printing press somewhere in Washington?

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's certainly my view, yes. If the Congress sets out a charter and tells us we may do this, it should not be thwarted by a group of individuals who are acting contrary to the country's interests.

Q: Good. I'm glad we got that last thing. We have to get a couple of shots. We're not going to let you go quite yet.

MAN: Admiral, while he's just turning you around, I want to make a personal appeal with you. I think Herbie had mentioned it before.

In order to get this thing balanced and to give it some, you know, greater impact, I needed to have somebody who was exposed, so you get some human statement. And Herbert's been trying very hard to help on this; McMann is trying to help, but the cover people in McMann's section, rightly I suppose, say there is a problem there. For example, I know Larry Dernacei (?) down in Mexico....

[Recording cut off at this point.]